

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A NARROW ESCAPE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DUNNE," "NO ALTERNATIVE," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE TIDE IS TURNED.

KATE bending wearily, after many long hours of incessant head and hand work, over the conclusion of a chapter that has not written itself easily, is a widely different Kate to the elastic, vigorous, beautiful, brilliant young woman who was employed in the congenial task of winning her cousin Frank, when she was first introduced to your notice. That Kate was all easy, nonchalant grace and freedom. This one is fettered by fatigue, and the consciousness that, for her, there can be no respite from that fatigue. For with the failure of *The Unwarrantable* has come the failure of the certain income she made by it. With fell rapidity she is learning the harsh lesson that all the markets overflow, and that the ease with which she gained access to *The Unwarrantable* was one of those exceptions which prove the rule, that it is extremely difficult for a novice to get into print.

Straitened in circumstances, apparently deserted by the only two people in whose friendship she had for a long time been able to retain a belief—her cousin Frank, namely, and Captain Bellairs—working hard in the hopeless way in which one does literary work when need goads us and we are not sure of a place for it when it is finished; what wonder that Kate is rapidly losing her verve, her elasticity, worse than all for a woman, her beauty. Long lines of care are traced beneath her eyes; those eyes themselves are tired, and shadowed darkly by the sadness of the present and the future which they are for ever contemplating. No note of reply has

come to that short appeal she has made to Captain Bellairs. "I am forgotten, absolutely forgotten by everyone," she says, hopelessly throwing down her pen as she writes the last words of the chapter which has taxed her energies severely, and which she hates now that she has done it. She will be surprised herself when she sees it in print, and finds how easily the hardly-written chapter reads.

"It is only like Frank to vacillate, and blow hot and cold, and utterly forget the person who is not actively contributing to his pleasure or his pain," she says to herself—"but the other one! How can he forget that he taught me to rely on his friendship? how can he forget that he taught me to find it the brightest element in my life? He need have no dread of my trying to win more from him; but the companionship, the feeling that he had sympathy with me! Oh dear! what sin have I committed that he should punish me by withdrawing all this, and leaving my life more desolate than it was before?"

She cannot answer herself, and there is no one near to answer her. It is useless to go on meditating on the inexplicable. The full hot beams of the August sun are pouring into her room. The row of flowers outside fails to afford any shade now. They have not been replenished lately, and they have grown weedy and straggling. Her room is pretty, and to a certain degree artistic in its arrangements. But it is barren in her eyes, for she has been obliged lately to rob it of many of her choicest possessions, and turn them into money, in order that she might live.

"I'll set to work again at ten o'clock," she thinks; "and I know a walk in the meantime would be good for me; but the mere goodness of it isn't enough to draw

me out without another motive, while the sun is up, and the glare so great that all the ugliness and sordidness of the world stand out in bold relief. Semi-darkness softens down everything. I'll wait for the semi-darkness."

She is not one of the women who lounge away much of their time. Lassitude and herself are comparative strangers. But this evening the brain-weariness which oppresses her communicates itself to her frame, and she goes over to a sofa in the darkest corner, and presently is fast asleep.

In a happy dream that is partly supplied by memory and partly by fancy, she remains steeped in unconsciousness for hours. When she wakes herself the moon is shining softly, and an uneasy feeling pervades Kate, that she is not alone in the room, that there is some one near her.

"Kate," a familiar voice says before her heart has time to give more than one throb of fear; "Kate, dear! I thought you would never wake," and she finds herself taken by both hands and raised from her recumbent position by her cousin Frank.

With a few words of hearty, cheery welcome she springs to her feet and lights her lamp, and comes back to his side, to tell him how glad she is to see him again. It is the first time they have met since May's death.

"Why have you never written to me?" he asks, taking both her hands, and gazing searchingly into her face.

"I wrote once, when your wife died. I wrote to offer you all my sisterly love and sympathy then, Frank; and as you never answered me I thought that you didn't want either."

"You wrote then?"

"Yes; have you forgotten? Well, poor boy, I don't wonder at your forgetting; you have had enough lately to drug your memories."

"I never had your letter," he says, impatiently. "Forgotten it! I was always longing to receive it; if I had done so, I shouldn't have been likely to let it remain unanswered, or to forget it; why, Kate, I have felt your holding aloof from me as the hardest blow of all."

"Yet you have held aloof from me?"

"That's a very different matter; I have had to consider several things; I have been working in chains, to tell the truth, but I am determined to break them now; I have come to tell you—"

"Tell me about you all," Kate inter-

rupts, hastily; "how is Aunt Marian, and the girls? are they married, or engaged? and tell me about your little child, Frank."

"My mother and the girls are well; as for the child, I am not sure that I have anything to do with it, though I'm its father. It seems to be entirely Constable property, and if my own mother and sisters so much as look at it there is a fuss immediately in the Constable camp, and they declare that something has gone wrong with it."

He looks gloomy and self-absorbed; discontented and unhappy, and Kate's heart yearns towards him.

"Grandmothers often do make everybody about them excessively uncomfortable by their love for their grandchildren," she says, excusingly; "it will be different by-and-by when the child is older and comes to you; is it with Mrs. Constable altogether?"

"It's worse than that," Frank says, with a piteous grimace; "when my poor girl died I let them settle things exactly as they pleased, and when I began to think about how things were going, I found that Mrs. Constable had let her own house on rather a long lease, and had come to live in mine; since then the Granges have quartered themselves on me, for a visit that bids fair to last for the term of their natural lives! Heaven and earth! I never realised how odious my fellow creatures were, until I fell under the dispensation of the Constables."

Kate bursts out laughing.

"It is a piteous picture," she says; "but why, if you don't like your guests, don't you define the term of their visit? Mrs. Constable is placid and powerless enough."

"Backed up by the baby she's appallingly strong," Frank replies. "You don't know how that innocent child is used for the overthrow and complete subjugation of its wretched father. If I smoke in my own study, the only room in the house where I am not liable to a Constable invasion at any moment, the 'baby's cough' is dwelt upon with such sad gusto for days afterwards that I feel an infanticide; if I am out late at night, they declare that on my return home the nurses heard me and were alarmed, and in turn woke the baby and alarmed it, and that its state for days will, in consequence, be critical."

"And you stand this?"

He shrugs his shoulders.

"But why, Frank, why? I, as a woman, would shatter such chains in an hour; and you, with your brains, the prestige of the name you have made—oh! it's ignominy of the worst kind," the girl cries out, angrily.

He rises impatiently and paces about the room.

"Look here," he presently bursts out, "it's all very well to talk in that way, Kate; but the ground is cut from under my feet. I have wasted nearly every thing I could lay my hands on in that infernal magazine, and the prestige seems to have gone from my name in consequence of it; while I was neglecting dramatic writing for the sake of doing a big thing with the magazine, other fellows came and hit the managerial and public tastes; and now, when I want to go back to it, they say, 'No, thank you; we've hit out something fresh, your vein is played out.' Besides, it isn't the need of making money that bothers me. I shall be all right again in a short time; it's the not having my home to myself that I can't stand."

"As I said before, get rid of them; you pay the rent of the house, don't you?"

"Yes; and they are careful to make me comprehend that they know from whom the money originally came with which the rent is paid," he rejoins. "My dear Kate, there is only one thing that will oust them from my house, and that is my taking a wife into it."

Now Kate knows that the words which she is most strangely anxious to avert will make themselves heard presently. How can she tell him a truth, that it will be very bitter for him to hear, namely that her heart has withdrawn itself from him as utterly as if it had never been given? "And poor Frank is so sure of me too," she adds, mentally.

"That would be a very strong measure, wouldn't it?" she answers aloud, as calmly as she can. "At any rate, you can't think of taking it yet for many months to come. Don't talk of marriage as your only means of escape from such contemptible bondage either, dear Frank; it's degrading to the possible woman whom you may marry. It's just the time I had fixed upon to recommence my work," she adds abruptly. "Come and see me soon; to-morrow, if you like; but leave me now, for my work must be done."

"My poor girl!" he says, and he says it

very tenderly, and draws himself nearer; while she busies herself with the arrangement of her writing materials.

"Don't pity me," she says, with a slight quiver in her voice. "In a little time I mean to ask you to congratulate me as a successful author. By-the-way, did I help to kill *The Unwarrantable*? It has been on my conscience, very often, that I sapped its constitution, and undermined its strength?"

"You shall hear me; you shall not put me off with commonplaces any longer," he says, petulantly. And he puts his arm round her, and draws her close to his side. "Have you forgotten——"

"I have not forgotten anything," she interrupts, rapidly. "I have not forgotten that I loved you weakly and wickedly; and that I showed that love to a wicked and weak degree, considering that you were engaged, honour-bound, to another woman."

"I am free now," he replies.

"Ah! but Frank," and here all the contradictory spirit of the true woman shows itself, "I told you I had not forgotten anything. Among other things I have not forgotten how you played fast and loose with me, when every time you drew the strings to regulate my conduct, you must have known that you were breaking the very fibres of my heart."

She speaks with almost convulsive energy, and he looks at her with the blank astonishment a man is apt to feel, when a woman does not show herself ready to throw herself at his feet the instant he whistles for her.

"I was tongue-tied, hand-bound," he is beginning, but she stops him.

"Don't excuse yourself; you acted for the best, according to your lights, and we have both suffered; but the suffering is past now, and we can take each other by the hand, and heartily hope that each other's future will be happier than the past, and be quite satisfied that these futures will not be spent together."

"In fact, you have quite done with me?" he says, in a hurt tone.

"Yes, Frank, as I would have done with a horse that refused a big leap with me, a hound that took to running cunning, or any man who withdrew his friendship from me, when he had taught me to find that friendship very dear, and the brightest thing in my life."

"You use hard words, Kate," he says, in an offended tone. Somehow or other,

that sentence, respecting the "hound which has taken to running cunning," galls him considerably. For he is ignorant of the fact of its being a coursing term, and fancies that it is specially applied to himself.

"And you used harder deeds—deeds that hurt me horribly," she retorts, quickly; "you cured me of my love by cruelty."

"Cruelty!"

"Aye, cruelty; there are more cruel things than striking a blow with your hand, I think; you gave me a glimpse in my shaded life, of what life might be to me illumined by the sunshine of your sympathy and love; and you withdrew them from me, just as they had become essential to me; wasn't that cruel?"

"It was, Kate."

"It was nothing of the sort, it was weakness of will; it was the veriest bowing the head before the image of the dread Mrs. Grundy. Oh, Frank! don't rouse my feelings of indignation on behalf of that girl whom you toyed with thoughtlessly. I think of her as entirely another being from myself, I assure you; let us put everything but cousinly feeling and friendship away from us, and you'll find me all that either of the fondest can ever be to you; but don't talk of other love; that is over."

All this time his arm has been round her, and her hands have been clasped on his shoulder. She releases herself from him now, after just leaning her face towards, and giving him a kiss, so quiet and passionless, that it tells him more plainly than her words even, that her love for him is indeed dead. "Is there another fellow in the way?" he asks himself, angrily, but he dare not ask the question of her yet.

"I shall come again to-morrow; I won't let the little interest you have in me still, drop."

"Do come—not that I need your presence to keep my interest in you alive," she says, frankly; and just then the post-man's rap is heard, and a letter is brought in and handed to her.

His quick glance falls on handwriting and crest at once; he recognises both, and his jealous fancy tells him, that in that letter is to be found the cause of Kate's refusal to listen to the renewal of his own love-vows.

"I had better leave you, perhaps," he says, pointedly, "your letter will take you

about an hour to read, judging from the length of it."

"Perhaps you had," she says, in the vague way people do speak, when they are striving to master the contents of a letter which they have been eagerly anticipating.

R A T S.

ACCORDING to Mr. Darwin, there is a struggle for existence among all living creatures, ending with a survival of the fittest. He does not give a moral meaning to this word fittest; he is speaking of living creatures generally, as organisms, and of the organic qualities which enable them to fight their way in the world. Naturalists say that this struggle and this survival are unquestionably true in regard to rats. The two principal kinds known are the black and the brown, the latter being the more powerful of the two. Both entered Europe from Asia, the black about four centuries, the brown about two centuries ago. The brown is also known as the Norway rat and the Hanoverian rat; the latter a name sarcastically given by the Jacobites, under the belief that the brown rat and the royal family of Hanover reached England about the same time. The brown has waged relentless war against the black, until the latter has almost disappeared from some localities. This disappearance, or lessening in number, is also due in part to the black rat finding his home in roofs, thatch, and old buildings, where rat-terriers and rat-catchers can get at him; whereas his brown rival has a greater love for drains, sewers, and underground retreats, difficult of access. When some of the slums of St. Giles's were pulled down to make way for New Oxford-street, a colony of black rats was found in many of the wretched tenements, driven up from the sewers by the victorious browns. The keeper of a Happy Family cage had a few of them, and sold them occasionally for high prices to naturalists, who valued them solely because they are rare—as collectors are very apt to do. A few black rats still exist in old houses in London, among the roof-rafters; but they are very few.

The brown rat is a famous trencherman. Nothing comes amiss to him. Corn, the offal of slaughter houses, cheese, soap, candles, bacon, eggs, jams, pastry, butter, oil, boots and shoes, leverets and other small game, all serve him when hungry. But, sad to relate, he is also a cannibal;

he eats his own species. When two rats fight, the one killed and the other sadly mutilated, the spectator-rats set to and eat them both. A lame or decrepit companion shares the same fate. Mrs. Rat is obliged to conceal her little ones for a time, lest papa or his friends should make a meal of them. On one occasion in France, twelve rats were shut up in a box; the result was nearly as marvellous as the fate of the celebrated Kilkenny cats; for when the box was opened, only three rats remained.

Even human beings are not quite free from danger. The fingers and toes of babies, lying peacefully in their cradles, have been eaten off by rats; once an infant's face was almost obliterated by similar means; and (we record it with less regret) the toes of a drunken man disappeared through a like agency. About four years ago a coroner's inquest, reported in the Times, brought to light a sad tale. Between Highgate and Hornsey, an old house had lost a respectable tenant on account of its being infested with rats. A new tenant out all day on business, and his wife out temporarily, three children were left at home in bed. On the mother's return, she found the bed stained with blood; one child had wounds in the head and under the eyelids, and a hole eaten through the cheek; she died three days afterwards; an elder child was bitten in the throat.

Mr. Rat displays a good deal of ingenuity in working out some of his plans. He can carry away eggs without breaking them; he stretches out one foreleg under the egg, steadies it with his cheek, and hops away cautiously on the other three legs. Two of them, working together, have been known to carry eggs up-stairs; one standing upon his head, lifted an egg high up on his hind feet; his confederate, standing on the next step above, took the egg, and held it until the acrobat had come up; after which the same process was repeated again and again. A pastrycook once found that his eggs disappeared in a mysterious way; an investigation showed that rats made off with them, down-stairs instead of up. A big rat stood on his hind legs, with his fore paws and head resting on the step above; a smaller rat rolled an egg gently to the proper spot; the big fellow seized it firmly but carefully in his fore-paws, and brought it down; and so on, step after step. One particular egg adventure is as amusing as a comedy,

with the additional merit of being true. A rat lay down beside an egg, folded his body round it lengthwise, and took his tail between his teeth to get a firmer hold; other rats approached, seized him by the neck, and dragged him and the egg off together in triumph—on what principle the booty was divided, does not appear. Mr. Jesse narrates an incident, in which a rat helped himself to savory Florence oil in an ingenious way; the animal gnawed off the covering of the flask, inserted his tail, and licked off the unctuous treasure which adhered to it. A drum of figs being within sight of a family of rats, papa-rat got upon the table, upset the drum, and scattered the figs on the floor, where the others could easily get at them. Some of us are old enough to remember when an atmospheric or pneumatic railway was constructed at Croydon; the engineers had so many difficulties to contend against, that the enterprise was ultimately abandoned; but one of the most provoking was that rats cunningly came at night, and ate the grease with which the valve along the top of the tube was rendered air-tight; each new application of grease served them for supper. Mr. Jesse, on the authority of a medical friend, gives a vivid description of a desperate fight between a rat and a ferret, in a vault or cellar which was only lighted with a window on one side; the rat kept his powerful enemy at bay for nearly two hours, by sagaciously securing to himself what prize-fighters call the "advantage of the sun:" that is, keeping himself almost in darkness under the window, and compelling the ferret to take a position where the light would enter his eyes and embarrass him. One rat was a little too clever on a certain occasion. A publican, going into his cellar, saw a large rat put his foot into the shelly house of an oyster who temptingly opened his mouth; the oyster suddenly closed his shell, took the rat prisoner, and both were carried alive into the kitchen. Considering what the Happy Family men manage to achieve, we do not know that we are justified in disbelieving a story of a theatrical company of rats, exhibited in Belgium a few years ago; dressed like men and women, and walking on their hind legs, they mimicked many ordinary stage effects; concluding their performance with hanging a cat and dancing round it!

On the principle of giving everyone his due, however sable his complexion, we

must say a word concerning the occasional kindness and domesticity of these rodent creatures. A Sussex clergyman, one summer evening, saw a number of rats migrating across a meadow; a blind old rat was guided along by a companion, the two holding the two ends of a stick between their teeth. Mr. Pinder, a navy surgeon, was lying awake one evening in his berth, on board the Lancaster; and, keeping quiet, was enabled to observe a curious scene. A rat entered the cabin, looked cautiously round, and retired; he came again, lugging along a blind rat tenderly by the ear; and a third rat, following them, picked up bits of biscuit to place before the poor blind fellow. A London omnibus man caught a rat while removing some hay. Instead of killing it he took it home, and so tamed it as to make it a familiar companion to his children. In the evening the rat would stretch itself out at full length on a rug before the fire; and he would creep into some warm snugger on a cold night. In the morning, when the man said, "Come along, Ikey," the rat would jump into his great-coat pocket, from whence he was transferred to the boot of the 'bus. Ratty guarded his master's dinner, and rushed somewhat furiously against anyone who tampered with it. He was proof against all temptations save one—it was not safe to set him to guard over plum pudding. An old blind rat took refuge by the kitchen fire in the house of a physician, and became a favourite, until a strange cat unfortunately one day made his appearance, and put an end to the harmony. M. De la Tude, in his sad narrative of thirty-five years' imprisonment in the Bastille, describes how he gradually formed an acquaintance with ten rats in his dungeon; he gave them distinct names, which they recognised, and he got up various kinds of simple gambols or sports, in which they took part.

Of what use is the rat to man? Well, not very much that we know of; yet a few items may be mentioned. Probably we must not attach much importance to the alleged prophetic powers of the rat—that if he gnaws a person's clothes, that person will speedily die; that if he suddenly quits a house, the house will very shortly be burned down; that if he deserts a ship, the ship is in a sinking state. A mill at Peebles was suddenly deserted by a whole colony of rats about twenty years ago; two hours afterwards the mill was burned down. But it must be confessed

that the logic is very weak, which proves, from these facts, the possession of any prophetic power by Mr. Rat. We have evidence that he has sometimes been made useful as an R.E. or an R.A. James, in his Military Dictionary, says, "Rats are sometimes used in military operations, particularly in enterprises for the purpose of setting fire to gunpowder. On these occasions a lighted match is tied to the tail of the animal. Marshal Vauban recommends, therefore, that the walls of powder magazines should be made very thick, and the passages for light and air so narrow as not to admit rats." We do not know whether a cruel sport can be called a useful employment of rats; but an account is given of a strange proceeding at Rome. A large number of rats were dipped in spirits of turpentine, set on fire, and made to rush down an open flight of steps near the Vatican; they reached the bottom as masses of charred flesh, amid the shouts of the populace. Rats are worth three shillings a dozen, to furnish a supply to those brutal exhibitions in which rat-killing terriers show their power. The mode of catching the rats alive for this purpose we shall describe presently. Rats are also caught for the value of the skins. There is a firm at Paris which buys the skins for this purpose. The fur is dressed into a very good substitute for beaver; while the pelt or membrane is dressed into leather so fine, elastic, and close as to be used for the thumbs of the best gloves. If anyone believes that rats are not used for human food, he must change his opinion. In Paris the chiffoniers or bone-grubbers eat them. Gipsies eat such rats as are caught in stacks and barns, and are less strong in flavour and odour than those that feed omnivorously. In China, split rats are bought as a dainty. An English surgeon of some note had them cooked for his own eating. In a man-of-war, where the rats made havoc with the biscuit, the sailors had a regular battue, and brought down numbers of them; Jack made rat-pie, baked it, and liked it. At the siege of Malta, the French garrison, when famished, offered as much as a dollar a-head for rats, or two dollars if barn-fed. During the siege of Paris, in the late Franco-German war, many tasted rat who had never tasted it before.

The fecundity of the brown rat is prodigious, and it has been calculated that if Mr. and Mrs. Rat live three years after their first child is born, and if all

the children, children's children, children's children's children, &c., survive, the family at the end of the three years would comprise six hundred thousand mouths. As a rat is credited with eating one-tenth as much as an average man, this interesting family would consume as much as an army of sixty thousand men.

Unquestionably, whatever may be the degree of fecundity and voracity, rats are generally a great nuisance, and require to be lessened in number if not extirpated. Let us notice some of the varieties in which the nuisance presents itself, and the mode of procedure consequently adopted.

Rats on board ship.—Rats greatly infest ships, and are by them carried to every part of the world. So industriously do they make homes for themselves in the numerous crannies and corners in the hull of a ship, that it is almost impossible to get rid of them. Ships take out rats as well as passengers and cargo every voyage; whether the former remain in the ship when in port is best known to themselves. When the East India Company had ships of their own, they employed a rat-catcher, who sometimes captured five hundred rats in one ship just returned from Calcutta. The ship-rat is often the black species. Sometimes black and brown inhabit the same vessel; and unless they carry on perpetual hostilities, the one party will keep to the head of the vessel and the other to the stern. The ship-rat is very anxious that his supply of fresh water shall not fail; he will come on deck when it rains, and climb up the wet sails to suck them. Sometimes he mistakes a spirit cask for a water cask, and gets drunk. A captain of an American merchant ship is credited (or discredited) with an ingenious bit of sharp practice as a means of clearing his ship from rats. Having discharged cargo at a port in Holland, he found his ship in juxta-position to another which had just taken in a cargo of Dutch cheeses. He laid a plank at night from the one vessel to the other; the rats, tempted by the odour, trooped along the plank, and began their feast. He took care that the plank should not be there to serve them as a pathway back again; and so the cheese-laden ship had a cruel addition to its outward cargo.

Rats in the Zoo.—Some years ago the rats wrought such execution at the Zoological Gardens, in the Regent's Park, that it became necessary to surround the duck-ponds with a wire net fencing. Other

parts of the garden were similarly infested, the rats being attracted by the large quantity and variety of food stored there every day. Soon after the construction of the new monkey-house, they ate through the floor, whereupon the floor was filled in with concrete, and the open roof was ceiled; but they quickly made their way through the plaster of the latter, determined if possible to get at the monkeys' bread. They also got into the den of the rhinoceros. The cunning rogues were sometimes seen in the evening swimming across the Regent's Canal, to spend a night in feasting in the gardens, and returning at morn to a secure retreat during the day-time. It became necessary to hunt them with terriers, and then their carcases were thrown as dainty bits to the eagles and vultures.

Rats in slaughter-houses.—Parent Duchatelet gives a graphic account of the prodigious colony of rats in the abattoirs of Montfauçon, near Paris. "An old proprietor of one of the slaughter-houses had a certain space of ground entirely surrounded by walls, with holes only large enough for the ingress and egress of rats. Within this enclosure he left the carcases of two or three horses. The rats swarmed in thickly to partake of the feast. He caused the holes to be quietly stopped up, and entered the enclosure, with a thick stick in one hand and a lighted torch in the other. They were so congregated that a blow with a stick anywhere did execution. Before he left the enclosure, he had killed more than two thousand six hundred."

Rats in the sewers of Paris.—Some years ago (perhaps recent alterations have changed the state of affairs) the Paris sewers formed an extensive hunting-ground for the men who captured rats alive, to sell to the rat-killing sporting fraternity. Several men, working in a party, formed a plan as to the spot towards which the animals should be driven. Each man carried a lighted candle, with a tin reflector, a bag, a sieve, and a spade. The moment the rats saw a light, they ran away along the sides of the sewer; the men followed, came up to them, seized them behind the ears, and bagged them. When driven to bay from different directions into one spot, they sometimes turned upon their pursuers with desperate fierceness; but the latter were always masters of the situation in the long run. As to London, the excellent brickwork of the

new main drainage sewers probably defies the rats; but they still continue their ramblings from sewers through house drains into the basements of old tenements.

Rat-catchers and rat-catching have been written about more voluminously than most persons would think. The royal rat-catcher, in the time of George the Third, was immortalised in an engraved portrait. Eleven years ago, a local board of health, in or near Bristol, granted an annuity of four pounds a year to John Leaky, on the representation of the butchers; "for his services rendered in ridding the slaughter-houses from rats, and on condition of his keeping them away for the future." Two celebrated rat-catchers, Shaw and Sabin, claimed to have caught eight or ten thousand rats a year each. As to the modes of capture, they are various. One mode is to select a small room in the middle of a house, lay a trail of favourite food from this to the other rooms, and allure the rats with the savoury odour of toasted cheese or red herring. A second is, to allure by whistling to imitate the rat-cry. And there are many others. But in truth the professional rat-catchers do not care to reveal their secrets. Many years ago, the Society of Arts offered a prize of fifty pounds for the best preparation to catch rats alive; but the only men who could give reliable information held aloof, as the reward was too small to tempt them. Rat-poisons are advertised in plenty; but they are ticklish matters to deal with.*

LEARNING TO COOK.

LESSON THE THIRD.

PARISINA'S reflections on the third day's cooking lesson (when she was in right circumstances to make them) was suggested by our brothers at the Hincksey Diggings, under John Ruskin; their sisters at pot and pan cleaning, under some other charming enthusiast. An historic repetition. Born—both examples—of over-idleness, of over-enervation, of over-fastidiousness and riches; being, both of them, a helter-skelter, willy-nilly, mad-cap, rush into the opposite extreme. The poor limp Lucy's exclamatory sigh, at the first moment of meeting, was "O-o-o-oh dear, I cannot go on. I must miss to-morrow. I shall ask leave. It can't do harm to miss one day. I can do what I

ought to have done the next. O-o-o-oh dee-ar."

The Princess beamed; as waxen, as immovable; with liquid eyes heavenly, in their fixed and bewitching stare. Modesta, as was due, kept her place in becoming shadow. The rest stood, or leant, or unrolled their aprons, or pinned up their sleeves, or looked from one to another with a shy salutation smile. We all stepped out, and across in the usual drove, to the scullery, when the satisfactory cook came to us to begin, bringing the signal that it was time.

The lady in charge reviewed us in her previous rapid artillery-fire manner. "Who was to take a kitchen-range to-day? Yes, yes, it was you, I remember. Very well. Go into the kitchen and I'll—"

See to the rest, was the remainder of her speech, no doubt; but a sharp turn into the kitchen in search of our new instruction, not only hindered us from hearing, but landed us amid an engrossing set of operations, all of which naturally struck us as being much more interesting than our own particular work.

"You are for the range?" we were asked by our teacher. And in an instant, some of us were to kneel upon the floor to polish the kitchen fire-irons and fender with scouring cloth, one more was to rake out the ashes of yesterday's spent fire. It was not till the teacher left us for a moment, to procure some implement necessary to our further progress, that one of us, Modesta, could get in a short congratulatory whisper.

"I am glad it's this open range to-day," it was. "The close one is alight, you see, and that would be no good to me at all. Will the range you will have to do with, be close, or open?"

"Haven't the least idea." Lucy was the speaker, sighing hopelessly.

But Lucy had a season of relief. She found she could sit on one half of the substantial fender, whilst she feebly rubbed the other with the scouring cloth. It was quite pleasant to see her timely recovery, to see the renewed vigour she was able, this way, gradually to accumulate. "And I brought a pair of old gloves to-day, too," she said, after an interval, quite cheerfully. "I hope it will come to my share to do some of my favourite blacklead."

It did, but not till its proper turn. It had to be preceded by flue-cleaning (the raking and the cinder-sifting being done),

* ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, Vol. 9, p. 245: "Borgia in the Kitchen."

precisely the same as if each lady had been a professional sweep. Some pupils made so much preparation for this, that they borrowed clean dusters of the cook, and hung them over their smart chignons, with a deft fold and pinning that must have been the identical trick for the head-dress of the Sphinx; others went in boldly with bare heads, heedless, ignoring everything save that they had come to learn.

"This is the flue-brush," said Ann, the teacher, beginning chapter one of this section of her instruction, "and these are the soot-doors. You must open these doors, and then push the brush up and down and every way as far as it will go. The handle is wire, you see, so it will bend whatever way you want it."

Yes, it would; the neat double-twist of iron-wire offering no impediment to the most persistent hand that possibly could urge it. It was available to perform a perfect pirouette behind the decorated iron-plates that faced the brick-work of the chimney; a sort of spin, like that of a conjuror's ball, when he wishes to clear a space. It was available, also, to make the most inquisitive lunges into the remotest corners. The back of the boiler had to submit to the invasion of it; the back, and sides, and top of the oven had to submit to the invasion of it, and then there was a cunning little trap underneath the oven, for the safe keeping of all the routed soot, that had to be opened and assailed, and to put up with conquest as uncomplainingly as the rest. A dust-pan was introduced in front of this last to receive the sweepings, and then the flue-cleaning part of the lesson was done. One or two pupils, however, not practising the operation (one hand only being required for the brush-thrusting), had dropped into inattention.

"I," began one, hesitatingly, "I didn't see what those little iron doors were for."

It was tantalisingly apparent what they were for, and had Mistress Tart been the professor, out would have come a verbal soufflet for an answer; but Ann was very kind and good tempered, and she patiently (but necessarily briefly, and without positive illustration) went through her explanation again. As it finished, the Lady Lucy made herself long and limp once more, with a spectre-like rise from off her fender. Her motive was to put in a liquid and low apology.

"I beg your pardon," she said in a haze. "Doors, what doors? Soot, what soot? Brush, what brush? I didn't hear."

Ann repeated. It was for this, and for that, it was to be done so, and to be done so. And very thoroughly, because very often the only cause of chimneys smoking was that they were foul, and if the soot were let to collect round the oven and boiler, the heat of the fire could never reach them, and they would never get properly hot.

Lucy languidly denoted thanks of satisfaction. "But then," her hazy words were again, with a pathetic effort at self-stimulation, "You told us something about this little round brass thing in the oven door. What is it, please?"

Ann repeated that. "It's only to regulate your oven," was her good-tempered account. "If it's cold, keep those little holes shut; if it's too hot, turn that handle till they're all open."

"Ah, yes."

It might have been the acutest solving of the most intricate problem, for the amount of brain power Lucy seemed obliged to concentrate upon it. It was very doubtful whether she had complete comprehension, even after this; but as blackleading was introduced by the professor as the next essential, all complexities were luckily pushed aside, and theory, for the moment, gave place to practice.

Blackleading is always a serious business. Whether under the piquant survey of little Mistress Tart, or the mild administration of Ann, the round brushes had, and ante, to lay the blacklead on, the oblong brushes had, presto prestissimo, to scramble the blacklead off. But the supplies ran short again. "May we ask for a little more blacklead?" was the consequent and venturesome application.

"Blacklead!" Such was the form Ann's politeness took, battling with her astonishment. "More blacklead! Oh! They go on so if we use too much blacklead."

That was just it; with variations. And it brought the certainty that there was stiff economy somewhere, and that the system of the cooking-school was consistent.

"Why mayn't we have more blacklead?" This came out a puzzled question from Lucy, blankly, when Ann had for a moment gone. Lucy had been brushing away with such renovated interest, that she had not heard.

"Because"—rapidly, and as a relished stage aside—"Somebody, or they, will go on so, if we do."

"Oh!"

Which meant, in various manners, that not one of us would have had the cruelty to cause Ann to be gone on at, on our account, for a kingdom, and that we would far rather go on ourselves deficient, than force her to suffer the indignity. We did go on, therefore, in best regulated fashion, and the going took us in proper time to a conclusion.

"Rub up the tap and the oven-handle, please, with leathers. Here they are."

Yes; we took the leathers in the palms of our hands and applied them, round and round, as if they had been pomatum. We took hold of their corners (when the form of the metal work rendered the other way no longer possible), and see-sawed them up and down with a jig-jag action as incessant as it was interesting. It produced the desired effect.

"You've done it very nicely," adjudged Ann. "It couldn't look better. Now, I'll lay the fire."

Parisina flew to the front.

"You'll lay the fire!" Her words spluttered out with a flash. "You mean we!"

Ann smiled.

"And I hope we are to light it!" This in vivid continuance. "I can't see how we are to learn, unless we do!"

Ann thoroughly foundered. She could no longer sail anywhere. Looking down, she did nothing, and simply let there be an interregnum.

Her silence and her discomfiture were the best panacea to Parisina. If anything were wrong, it was not Ann who wronged, after all; she was but the instrument. The conviction made a diminuendo in Parisina's tone.

"Well, I hope it is to be lighted." She spoke piano now. "Do you think it is?"

"I have had no orders," said Ann, in humble recovery. "I have not been told."

Then, of course, she was powerless. And so was Parisina. Being in the ship, the only plan was to go where the ship was going; it was mere absurdity to find fault with the helmsman for steering safely. So Ann remained on her knees before the grate, whilst Parisina (& Co.) watched. Ann took cinders, coal, sticks, and paper, and "laid" them with a precision that habit, doubtless, had made her second nature; but that might have been the worst principle in house-maidenhood, for all the chance we had of testing it, or

of imitation. However, the laying was done, Ann making a running commentary on her process; and then we had to give our undertaking the coup-de-grace.

"Now, you must do the hearthstoning, please. I will get a pail."

Parisina had a speech upon this, concise and cutting.

"Very odd, to say no more. We can lay a fire with only seeing it. We can't hearthstone, unless we really do it!"

Exclamation, declamation, proclamation—all were in vain. As the facts were, so they had to stand. And no one was more eager than Parisina when the pail came.

"What do we do first?" was her quick enquiry.

With the house flannel and the hot water we were to wash all the stone—the small space under the grate, the large, broad surface spread in front. Wash it thoroughly, with a good strong swing. This was accomplished. The second business was to scratch, and score, and scuttle over this washed material as though the washing had been a wicked mistake, and there was to be the utmost violence to eradicate it. "Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world!" seemed to be the sole actuating and avengeful spirit.

"But we're leaving the hearth all over clouds, and curves, and lines. Oughtn't it to look straight?"

"Oh, you'll do that by-and-by," said Ann, in calm comment on the modest piece of consternation. "I shall show you. It doesn't matter which way you rub it now."

Ah, was it so? Then good, our fellow-pupils, for a wild skirmish; a skate as near skittishness as a cooking-school might let it be. This took place, as of a bright accord; and it brought knuckles in such close and quick proximity, there had to be a stop soon to ask a laughing pardon.

The incident gave enlivenment to Lucy. To the astonishment of all of us she actually showed a desire for knowledge. "What is hearthstone?" she asked, on her hands and knees, ceasing her careering a moment for the requisite silence.

Nobody knew. So the question was handed up to Ann, standing above her pupils loftily, and supposed, with profoundest respect, to know everything, and to be able to impart her information to everybody.

Ann was without this tutorial amount of knowledge, however.

"Hearthstone!" she repeated, prevaricatingly. "Hearthstone! Why, it's hearthstone—a composition!"

Ann's pupils were not imposed upon. They were polite enough, by silence and assiduity, to appear to accept what they had been told; and then an *à propos* interruption prevented the need of more.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, ladies?" This was asked us by Mrs. Cookett, the cook of the sinks, coming up with her neat and pleasant face.

"Well!" said Parisina, when she could, "that is nice! That is very thoughtful!"

And, the weather being hot, and kitchen-maid work a great deal hotter, Parisina, and the Princess, and many others left off labour for a minute and took the cups, and relishingly emptied them. Such a well-planned interlude seemed to make everything smooth and smiling.

"I want twopence each of you ladies, please!" cried Mistress Tart, determinedly, obtruding herself upon the scene, and ruffling all the peace of it away.

Parisina was too completely overtaken for either open word or deferred reflection. Her mental and vocal condition could only be represented by a great blank. In the upshot, money was produced all round, and work resumed.

"Now," explained Ann, "that you have laid on the hearthstone, you must smoothe it. You must take the house flannel, wrung dry—only one of you can do it—and you must go all over from side to side, just as long as it is. Yes, the whole length; quite straight, and that will leave it as it ought to be, and as you've always seen it."

A very good solution. A hand, quicker than the rest to volunteer, took the flannel in its strong hold, and carried the directions out. It moved timidly at first; but, on nothing serious happening, confidence came, and a few broad strokes, dealt with artistic accuracy, brought the thing to swift completion.

"That's all that; and very nice," was Ann's complimentary supplement. "I'll put back the fender and the fireirons—so; and now if you'll all come with me to the close range, I'll explain the difference between a close range and an open one."

More theory. And, as with theory before, it had for its accompaniment inattention. Ann went on for a long while patiently. This damper must be pulled out, so, if the fire were wanted very hot; that damper must be pushed in, that way, if the oven were found too cold; this steel

rail was for plates to rest on; that was for such a purpose, and that another. Then Ann suddenly saw that one of the pupils had wandered right away, and was looking, vacantly, at some other class; and Ann's patience vanished.

"There now!" she complained, pettishly, "you'll know nothing about a close range when they ask you! You haven't minded what I've said a bit!"

The pupil, in a doze nearly, with a plethora of theory, made a virtuous endeavour to shake herself wide-awake. Alas! it was to our weariness, and the further impatience of poor Ann.

"I told you!" cried the latter personage sharply. "I said this was so-and-so, and this was" some other (with smart pulls outward of the dampers, and smarter thrusts in; as if they had been refractory organ-stops, and the melody were seriously imperilled); "and I told you, you were not listening at all! Now let me see whether you do know."

Well, yes, the pupil did know; preternaturally getting rid of her summer sleep; but—Lucy didn't.

"I beg your pardon," she said, in the low tones of her apology; "but we open the oven-damper if we want to make it hot, don't we? Oh, we keep it shut?" Getting more rapid and confused as she saw Ann's change of face, "oh, yes, yes, to be sure! we open the chimney-damper if we want to make the fire hot; and we shut this, yes, yes; and we open that; and we pull out this; yes, yes; I see; it's so, and so, of course; I quite understand!"

Poor Lucy! She was as far off from understanding as if she had never stood in front of a close range at all; but she, and the rest of us, had been led through the gallery of instruction on that point, we were at the end, and we bid our cicerone farewell. We made tracks, straight and swift, for the sieves; we found some of the sieves at last, and, luckily, unappropriated; we scrubbed them with soap and water and the now-familiar spluttering brush; we rasped away at the appointed kitchen-knife, and table-knife, and three-pronged fork; and then the road was plain before us to begin the cooking on the morrow clear.

"I am so glad he has not been!" cried one pretty girl to another, as the clock struck twelve, and we were trundled out. "He is too late to see us in our degradation, as he said he would, and if he comes for the next part, I don't care!"

ON THE TERRACE.

THE stately lady, the grave calm man,
 Stood on the terrace together ;
 'Mid the bright rose thickets the revellers strayed,
 From lawn to fountain the children played,
 And hidden music sweet melodies made,
 At the fête in the July weather.

With careless languid courtesy,
 She bent to hear him speak
 Of the newest book and the latest play,
 Of the keenest move in the statesman's fray,
 Of the freshest topic of the day,
 Of the marvel of the week.

Lightly, with his practised tongue,
 He touched on all and each
 With here a sneer, and there a jest,
 And now a grave word, as to attest
 "I give you the foam on the top—the rest,
 No passing hand can reach."

Yet once, ah me, how long ago !
 Each one was all to the other,
 When every whispered word of his,
 Woke her young heart to a dream of bliss.
 Does the ghost of First Love's trembling kiss,
 Still lingering round them hover ?

The measure of the music changed,
 On the summer breezes stole
 A low, sweet, simple homely air,
 Such as one listens to everywhere ;
 To the two who lounged on the terrace there,
 It spoke, as to heart and soul.

Her proud head drooped, his low voice ceased,
 For a moment in thought they stood,
 Young, eager, fearless, happy, and true,
 As when no cold wisdom claimed her due,
 When love was fresh, and hope was new,
 At the tryst in the old oak-wood.

A vivid flush on the stern bronzed face.
 A tear in the large blue eyes.
 Then—back to the world, and its talk again,
 Custom closed chill o'er the instant's pain,
 For thought were a folly, and memory vain,
 In the path that before them lies.

PEASANT CUSTOMS IN SOUTH GERMANY.

THE subject of popular superstitions and observances is one of great interest, dating back as it does to remote ages.

Their heathen origin may still be easily traced, although Christianity has given them a somewhat different character, and the names of the deities themselves in whose honour the rites were originally established have been forgotten.

Before long the spread of civilisation will sweep away all remains of these ancient traditions, even in South Germany, where as yet they still retain a strong hold on the minds of the peasantry. It therefore appears well worth while to collect some account of these quaint customs before they become extinct.

Since the earliest times the breeding of horses has been especially cultivated in the grassy plains of Lower Bavaria, and also in the neighbourhood of the Allgäu and Inn mountains. When the troops of the

Bavarian dukes accompanied the German emperors in their expeditions to Rome, the Rott Thal chestnuts formed a highly esteemed body of cavalry; and to this day the Bavarian regiments of light horse obtain most of their steeds and their best riders from that part of the country, in which the youths possess traditional renown for courage and dexterity in the saddle.

The patron saint of all the districts where horse-breeding flourishes in Upper Germany is the holy horseman St. George, who is considered to be peculiarly learned in this branch. On the 24th of April, his festival pastimes take place, which evidently testify to a heathen origin. All the peasants of the neighbourhood assemble at some chapel dedicated to the saint, or else, according to a still older custom, where some gigantic oak or lime tree stands in the midst of a forest clearing, and serves as a trysting-place. Such patriarchal trees, some thousand years old, are called Ting-trees, and are still often to be found on the sites of the old Pagan altars in Bavaria. Thousands of horses and vehicles of every description form a circle round the sacred object. The people bring provisions and encamp in the open air; the priest preaches a sermon in the chapel, and then blesses the horses.

But the benediction is only intended to give a Christian character to the rite, and the matter of most importance in the Georgi-Ritt (George's Ride), as it is called, consists in the following process.

The young men mount their best horses, without saddles, and gallop three times round the chapel or tree, before which stands the priest, or in his absence an old peasant, who sprinkles the animals with holy water as they dash past, and casts upon them earth, which has been dug from the roots of the sacred tree. This ceremony preserves horse and rider throughout the year from sickness, stumbling, or falling; and formerly every peasant took home a handful of the healing earth in a bag, to hang up in the stable.

This is apparently the remains of the festival of some god of horses, whose protection was thus sought. It may have been Freyr, to whom horses' heads were especially sacrificed, and whose warlike attributes may easily have been transformed into the chivalrous dragon-slayer.

In other parts different saints are looked upon as patrons of horses, particularly St. Bernard and St. Leonard. The latter

acts a most important part in Upper Germany, for to him the peasant confides his greatest treasure, which he often values above house and family, namely, his cattle and his stables.

St. Leonard has become, for some unknown reason, the patron of all four-footed domestic animals; whilst the feathered race has its own saints. For instance, doves are under the protection of St. Columb, geese under that of St. Martin, and ducks belong to St. Vitus.

In the whole of Bavaria, Austria, Swabia, and the Allemannic part of middle Germany, there are countless small chapels, generally standing in some clearing of the woods, to which all the country people flock in pilgrimage on St. Leonard's day, November 6th, and then with horses and vehicles they drive round the sacred spot. This is called the "Lienhards-Fahrt" (Leonard's drive): it is similar to the "Georgi-Ritt," only the latter is confined to horses alone. The vehicles used on this occasion are constructed for the purpose, and consist of boxes on wheels. They are painted bright blue, and are filled with young and old folks, all gaily dressed in holiday attire. Some, who prefer riding, come with their horses decked out with ribbons and gaudy trappings. Even the Sennerin brings her cows from the mountain pastures. The day is concluded with music and dancing.

A thoroughly heathen idea is the common custom of offering to the Saint wax models of the limbs of such animals as are either sick, or have already been cured by his aid. In general, the offering is vowed when the illness breaks out, and presented after the recovery. Consequently, the altar of St. Leonard's Chapel is often quite covered with these gifts. Cow horns, goat horns, heads of oxen, horses' necks, pigs' snouts, the fore and hind legs of all domestic animals, and even their hearts, livers, and lungs, all testify to the power and veterinary skill of the Saint.

But St. Leonard meets with wrath, as well as gratitude, should his help not prove effectual. Like the old northern kings, who demolished the images of their gods, with clubs, if they were not victorious in battle, so did the Baden peasants in our own times, for they cast the wooden figure of St. Urban,* the

tutelary Saint of vine culture, into the Rhine, because he did not ward off the grape disease. Some Austrian peasants behaved in a similar manner: when the foot and mouth disease approached, they vowed and erected a new gilded statue to St. Leonard, to secure his protection, and when the complaint appeared, despite their precautions, and killed all their cattle, they destroyed the statue, and threw the fragments into the water, bitterly upbraiding the ungrateful Saint.

The beautiful custom of the Sonnwend fires, on the Eve of St. John the Baptist, is well known. At one time, attempts were made in official quarters to put them down, but in vain. The peasants were obstinate, and Government was forced to yield the point. Some years ago, as many as thirty-seven bonfires have been counted on the summits of the mountains which encircle the Chiem-See.

In the Harz Mountains, and on the Rhine, there are so-called Judas fires; in South Germany, and particularly the Bavarian Highlands, we find the Easter and St. John's fires. The former are lighted on Easter Eve, at the time when the Resurrection is considered to have been accomplished. On the 23rd of June the mountains are blazing with the Midsummer fires. Some days previously boys go about from house to house, collecting wood, and singing—

If here an honest man doth live,
A faggot he will gladly give;
Two faggots and two sticks, that so,
Our fire may bravely glare and glow!

Every household must contribute its share, or else the Bäuerin will find her hearth unproductive during the year. The flame itself possesses prophetic, saving, healing, and consecrating powers. Its height foretells the growth of the next crop of flax: whoever jumps over the fire will not suffer from sunstroke, rheumatism, or fever throughout the year. It is a universal custom to drive sick cattle either over the smouldering embers, or else through the flame, in order to restore them to health

as he thought would be most conducive to the growth of the vines, and his entreaty was granted. But he forgot the wind, and consequently the blossom all fell off. Only one bunch, which he had hung behind a door, ripened, thanks to the current of air. However, a voice from Heaven bade him not to be discouraged, for the solitary bunch of grapes would yield so much wine, that he would not have barrels enough to contain the quantity. And so it proved; but from henceforth St. Urban acknowledged that Providence understood the weather better than he did.

* The following quaint legend is told at Treves of St. Urban. He prayed that he might be allowed to regulate the weather, rain and sunshine, in such a manner

and to preserve them from witchcraft, accident, and pestilence. Amongst other things, a cart-wheel is dipped in pitch and poised on the end of a long stick; it is then set alight, and, after being whirled round a few times, it is hurled down the mountain-side, while the "wheel driver" dedicates it in some such lines as these—

Away my wheel now fly
To Mittenwald hard by,
But wheresoe'er I thee shall throw
To none but Lise thou must go!

In former times, when the priest himself used to bless the fire, the wheel was usually dedicated to the Holy Trinity. However, by degrees, worldly interests gained the upper hand, and the young men now generally celebrate the names of their sweethearts.

But the most important ceremony is when the youths and maidens leap through the fire, for that is a matter of heart and hand. The mere invitation is a public sign of wooing, and acceptance shows that the suitor is favourably received. One, who already feels pretty certain of his reception, approaches the maiden of his choice, claps his hands and sings—

Above my head, below my head,
My hat I gaily swing,
The girl that I love, now with me,
Must through the fire spring!

If he receives her hand as a token that she is willing to go through fire with him, as well as through life, the couple run hand-in-hand towards the flame, and attempt to spring over or through it. A successful spring is a sure sign that the two young people belong to one another; their love has been hallowed by fire. But should one chance to fall or stumble, something will probably cause their separation. The flickering or smoking of the fire signifies that trials are in store for the newly-formed alliance; but when the flames rise up high and clear during their leap, or crackle as though rejoicing over the agile pair, then the future life may be commenced at once in peace and security, for the Midsummer fire has foretold prosperity.

On Midsummer Eve, and also on the nights of St. Vitus (June 15th) and Peter and Paul (June 29th), a peculiar act of sorcery may be practised, which goes by the name of *Bilmes*, or *Bilwis-Schnitt*, and is evidently of very ancient origin. A peasant who wishes to possess his neighbour's corn, as it stands, makes a compact with the devil, who appears at his door on one of the aforesaid nights in the shape of

a rough black goat with fiery eyes. The *Neiding*, as the sorcerer is called, leaps on the demon's back and becomes, like him, invisible; on his left foot is fastened a sharp, glittering knife, and thus he rides round the fields of those neighbours who have the finest corn. The fiend-goat only touches the tips of the ears, and travels long distances with incredible speed. The result is, that not only is the corn mown down in the immediate track, which is only about a foot's breadth, but all that has been enclosed in the wide, magic circle must henceforth grow and ripen in the barn of the *Bilwis-Schneider*, whilst it disappears in the neighbours' fields.

But as great mischief may be thus wrought in a short time, it is said that the power of this witchcraft is limited to those three nights, and then only during curfew time; therefore a good sacristan knows that he must ring as short a time as possible on these evenings.

However, counter charms exist of white, or allowable magic, against the black of the *Bilwis* rider. Anyone who can find a cuckoo's nest, or the skin of an adder, or else an old mole-hill, and lays it on his head, and sits on a boundary stone, will become invisible, and can recognise the unholy rider. If he is called by name the goat vanishes with a howl, the sorcerer is thrown to the ground and sickens from that moment. Within a year and a day the devil fetches him. The mischief itself may be remedied and the bewitched ears of corn recovered by their rightful owner, provided the first harvest waggon is driven backwards into the barn.

According to some old traditions, however, the *Bilwis* was originally a benevolent, though tricky Kobold, whose great amusement was to tangle the children's hair in their sleep: but gradually his good qualities were forgotten, and he became an evil spirit.

At Whitsuntide, in many villages of Bavaria, Swabia, and the Upper Palatinate, is celebrated the *Whitsun-ride*. A procession of youths ride through the village, collecting contributions for the subsequent feast, and leading a comrade in their midst, enveloped in leaves and boughs, who is cast into the nearest pond or brook, and plentifully besprinkled with water. This appears to typify the victory of summer over winter, and as fragments of old songs testify, it was also an invocation to the gods that they should water

the verdant summer earth. In olden days a maiden represented the virgin green earth.

Processions are of frequent occurrence in all the Roman Catholic parts of Germany; partly remains of old heathen traditions, for we know from Tacitus and other sources, that solemn processions formed an important item in the ancient worship of the Germans, when the images of the gods were carried, or drawn in chariots, round the boundaries of the country, to spread peace and plenty. To this day there are curious superstitions connected with the Antlass or Corpus Christi procession. For instance, the branches of the young birch trees, under which the procession has passed, are the best safeguard against hail and lightning. When the storm rises, the dried leaves are reduced to ashes in an iron brazier, which must, however, on no account be riveted with a nail, or else the lightning will be attracted. Moreover, small flags on very long poles are waved during the procession, to drive away from the parish all evil spirits or threatening storms.

At the end of August, in South Germany, when the last sheaves are brought into the barn, there comes the joyous festival of the Sichelhenk (from Sichel—a sickle), which is in honour of the successful garnering of the corn, just as the Drischlhenk (from Dreschen—to thrash) celebrates the final thrashing of the year's fruits. He who has reaped and bound the last sheaf, hoists it on his shoulder, and leads the way to the barn. It is there laid down and the couples dance round. The sheaf is then divided: one half is decked with red ribbons and hung up in the shed, whilst the other is burnt on the open barn floor; the lads spring into the fire, and the girls cast in all sorts of small articles, such as ribbons, coloured paper or gingerbread, and preserve the ashes as a remedy against fever and rheumatism; they are likewise much used as love charms.

In many places the Bauer leaves the last ears of corn standing in the field, and the last apples hanging on the tree.

"That is for Wodan, for the old one," he says, mysteriously, when questioned. If this act of piety be neglected, the ground or tree whence all has been taken will bear no fruit next year.

In Lower Bavaria the same festival is celebrated in a still more mythological form. The reapers fashion the likeness of

a human figure from the last sheaf, with a stick in its hand and a wreath of flowers on its head. They then dance round it, and even kneel down before it and pray, though their devotions are now no longer addressed to the straw figure, but to the true God.

Nevertheless, such a prayer is still considered to protect the suppliant from any accident that might befall him in field labour during the year. The remains of the fruit and corn are also laid down before the figure, which is called the Aswalt or Oswalt.

With the first week in Advent the Anroller, Klöpfels, or Geb-Nächte begin. On Thursday evenings bands of young men or children, called Klöckler, go from house to house. They are armed with little wooden hammers, with which they knock at the windows, and then recite some rhymes, asking the inhabitants of the house for a small gift. This is supposed to be in pious memory of the wanderings of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, when the hard-hearted people of Bethlehem refused them shelter. The custom may be also traced to the time of the Plague, when peas used to be thrown against the windows to find out if anybody was alive in the house.

On the 6th of December, St. Nicholas appears, accompanied by his servant Klauf, or Wauwau. In the Vinschgau, in Tyrol, it is customary for all the children to sally out on the eve of St. Nicholas to a neighbouring hill. They hang bells about them, and then dance and shout for a certain time. This is called "awaking the Klauf." He is clad in a rough, hairy skin, with clanking chains hung about him. Over his shoulder are slung two sacks, into one of which he thrusts naughty boys and girls, whom he carries off to the woods, where he gobbles them up, but from the other he produces fruit and cakes for good children. Occasionally the heathen goddess Berahta, the Berchtfrau, accompanies the Christian bishop.

In the Italian Tyrol, St. Lucy takes his place, and in Luserna a shoe is placed ready to receive her gifts. This is a North German custom, and is unknown elsewhere in Tyrol. In many villages it is usual to gather branches from a cherry-tree on St. Barbara's Day, December 4th, and on St. Lucy's, December 13th, in order to make them bloom on Christmas Eve.

All species of black and white magic

are supposed to be specially effective on St. Thomas's night, December 21st, and Christmas night, and they are particularly devoted to the practice of love-spells, by curious maidens who wish to penetrate the veil of the future.

Lead, or else the yolk of an egg, is poured into water on the night of St. Thomas, and from the shape it assumes may be predicted whether the girl will marry, die, or remain single during the ensuing year; whether she will espouse an old or young man, citizen or peasant, rich or poor. Moreover, the right shoe must be thrown backwards over the left shoulder; should its tip point to the door, the bridegroom will be a stranger, but if the contrary, he will be someone in the village. Finally, the girl mounts on a stool just before getting into bed, and entreats St. Thomas to let her future husband appear in a dream. She also believes that whoever she first meets on her way to the Christmas midnight mass, or whoever first addresses her or shows her any civility, will eventually marry her.

On Christmas Eve the mangers are universally displayed in Tyrol, decked with fir branches, or in South Tyrol with ivy. A Tyrolese manger does not merely represent the Scripture narrative, but is also a miniature reproduction of mountain life. Chamois and hunters climb the snowy summits of the mountains; there is the neat peasant's house, and battlemented castles frown down from the rocks. Shepherds, Bäuerinnen, cattle dealers, and sennerinnen enliven the foreground. Miners are bringing the ore from the depths of the earth, and in a secluded grotto the long-bearded hermit is visible, engaged in reading or praying.

Till quite recently, the four elements were fed on the Holy Night, that they might be favourably disposed towards mankind. Flour was scattered in the air, a portion of food was buried in the earth, and some was thrown into the well, and on the fire.

In many parts it is still customary to shake, or embrace the trees in the orchard, saying, "Awake tree! This is the Holy Night, bring us apples and pears again." This is supposed to make them bear plentifully. During mass on Christmas Eve, the water in the wells becomes wine. Anybody may fetch as much wine as he likes, but woe to him who utters a syllable during the process.

At midnight the dead arise from their

graves, and hold a solemn service in church. Before going to mass, the Tyrolese place a glass or dish, full of water, on the table, and if it overflows during their absence, it signifies that the ensuing year will be wet. Hidden treasure may now be dug up, and on this night too the poacher casts his charmed bullets.

It is well known that on Christmas Eve animals have the gift of human speech. Anybody, who, as a child, slept in a cradle made out of the wood of a cherry tree, which grew from a stone dropped on a wall by a sparrow, can understand the discourse of the oxen and sheep in these holy hours.

The Christmas Tree is unknown amongst the Bavarian peasants. It is a North German, Protestant custom, and was only introduced at the beginning of this century by the Protestant princesses, who wore the crown of Bavaria. Through the court and aristocratic circles of Munich, it has now crept into the families of the citizens, and has penetrated to the provincial towns.

There is a strange custom throughout Bavaria and Swabia, called cutting the Kletzen or Scherzel. A maiden gives her betrothed the Kletzen, which is made of black bread, almonds, dried fruits, and figs, then she cuts off the round end, called the Scherzel, and they eat it together. This signifies that they have solemnly plighted troth for the ensuing year, and will share joy and sorrow. The manufacture of the cake is most important, and the Bäuerin fears illness or death, should it get burnt, or be otherwise unsuccessful. On St. John the Evangelist's Day, the red wine is consecrated in church, which the bridal couples drink at a marriage, and which is called St. John's Blessing.

Another quaint custom prevails in the Lech Valley, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The young men give the girls cake, receiving in return bread and brandy, after which the maidens allow themselves to be beaten by their lovers with willow rods on their hands, arms, and necks. This is called Kindeln; if the skin does not become thoroughly red, it is a sign that the love of the couple is weak and wavering. On this day also, the children parade the village streets, and are permitted to beat the grown-up people, for which they receive fruit and Kletzen.

At Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany

in Bavaria, Swabia, and a large portion of German Austria, there are processions of children, poor people, and youths disguised in various ways, who sing, recite verses, and improvise little dramas.

Especially in the Giengau and on the beautiful banks of the Alz, Traun, and Mangfall, the children still sing very ancient carols, of which the following is a specimen:

Sleep, sleep, sleep, Thou Dearest Babe, now sleep!
The angel choir with Heavenly voices,
Before Thee now in song rejoices,
Sleep, sleep, sleep, Thou Dearest Babe, now sleep.

Great, great, great, the Love is all too great!
God has left his Heavenly Home;
Through the ways of Earth to roam!
Great, great, great, the Love is all too great.

We, we, we, all cry aloud to Thee!
Open to us Heaven's Door
When this mortal life is o'er,
We, we, we, all cry aloud to Thee!

They go from house to house, and receive gifts of fruit and cake, in return for which they sing:

THE "STAR-SINGERS'" CAROL OF THANKS.

Gratefully now we,
Our best thanks accord you,
For all the gifts,
Which to us you have given.
God the Almighty
He will reward you
And will repay you
Your kindness in Heaven,
The Holy Infant in His Manger Bed,
And Mary, too, and Joseph, and the angels overhead.

These now together
Great might are possessing,
Since they in glory
United are all;
May they, too, grant you
The Heavenly Blessing
On your field's fruits,
And your beasts in the stall;
And have you safe from all evil and fear,
In health all together in this coming year.

Thus then we wish you
Even all here now,
Once more a happy,
And joyous New Year.
God the Almighty
He, too, is near now,
And to your comfort
Will grant us our prayer.
Lord Jesu, last of all may we,
Find rest in Paradise with Thee.

The Star of the East is rudely represented by a sun, cut out of paper and fastened on the top of a pole, which is carried by a boy at the head of the troop. It is believed that if anybody strikes one of these Dreikönigskindel (Three Kings' Child) during the singing, the hand of the striker will grow out of his grave. The season from Christmas to the Epiphany is called the Twelve Nights, and it is supposed that during this period

all spirits, good and bad, are permitted to roam the earth at will, and are visible even to those mortals who are not Sunday children.*

In every peasant's house, behind the never-failing crucifix over the little household altar, is preserved a bunch of palm catkins, branches of mistletoe, and a species of juniper tied to a hazel twig, which must, however, be peeled, or else the witches will nestle between the wood and the rind; and this acts as a talisman against fire and lightning.

The Bäuerin carefully treasures in her box a piece of walnut-wood, which has been burnt in a fire lighted before the church on Easter Eve, and likewise a white candle and a red wax taper, both consecrated at Candlemas. When a storm comes by day, the fire is kindled and a bit of the walnut-wood thrown in; if at night, the candle must be lighted. The same occurs at a deathbed, and during a confinement the red wax taper is wound round the woman's hand.

St. Sylvester's night, December 31st, St. Thomas's night, and the night of the Three Kings, as the Epiphany is called in Germany, are the four Incense Nights. The Bauer takes down the sacred Sengen from the main beam of the roof, where it has been carefully kept during the year. The Sengen consists of grass, flowers, and certain herbs, which must all be gathered with special ceremonies either on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, August 15th, or during the thirty following days; for a threefold blessing then rests on all the fruits of the earth, and even poisonous creatures become harmless. The dried leaves, mingled with juniper and other materials for frankincense, are strewn in an iron brazier, which the Bauer carries in his left hand. His wife and children precede him, bearing the keys and a light, and, if possible, a handful of snow. The master of the house also holds a stick in his right hand (probably it was a sword in former times), and thus, praying and censuring, he perambulates the house, stables, and barn. By this means all evil influences, sickness, and witchcraft are averted. Moreover, on the feast of the Epiphany, the initials of the Three Wise Men of the East are inscribed over all the doors, with a cross between each letter—C. + M. + B., and the following verse is recited:

* It is a popular belief that children born on Sunday have the power of seeing spirits.

The Three Kings come from the Eastern Land,
Each bearing gifts in the palm of his hand;
Balthasar drives all foes away,
Black Caspar hallowes the house each day,
While Melchior watches o'er bolt and pin,
To keep the blessing safe within.

The chalk used for the inscription is consecrated in church on the eve of the festival.

On St. Stephen's Day, the priest consecrates the salt and water used for the formation of the blessed "salt-stone," as the square piece of salt is called. Some grains of it are mixed with the food of sick animals, and the traveller on leaving his home takes a few morsels in his knapsack.

At Candlemas, all the servants in Tyrol change their situations, and the Fashing takes place with all its attendant merriment. One favourite game consists in youths dressing themselves up as old maids, and driving through the village on a cart en route to the Sterzing Morass, which is supposed to be the home of such individuals. There they are forced to spend their time in measuring out the wet moss with their fingers, until the end of the world. Bachelors, on the other hand, are located on the summit of the Rosskopf hard by, and are condemned to pile up the clouds, in which the mountain is constantly enveloped.

Winter is now supposed to be over, and in South Tyrol, the Fashings fires are lit on Shrove Tuesday, to celebrate the beginning of spring, or at Meran on the first Sunday in Lent. At Ulten, the people set fire to maize, and strew sheaves in the fields, and this is called "awaking the corn." In the Vinschgau, boys parade the village on the 22nd of February (the marriage of St. Peter) ringing bells and shouting "Peter Langas;" They thus announce the arrival of spring, which is called Langas by the peasants. In North Tyrol, winter has a longer reign, lasting till the end of March, and in the Lower Inn Valley, "Ringing out the grass," does not take place till the 24th of April, St. George's day.

It was believed that the beneficial effects of fire, water, salt, bread, meat, &c., became exhausted in the course of the year, and their powers must therefore be renewed at the commencement of a new year. Consequently, on certain days, every fire in the village must be extinguished. The whole population go to the wood in solemn procession, and there, with numerous symbols and ceremonies, a "need-fire" or "wild-fire" is created.

Two persons, who may either be young boys or a pair of lovers, rub two pieces of dry wood together until a flame is produced, repeating, meanwhile, mysterious rhymes. The head of a household then lights his torch at this sacred flame, produced by nature herself, and thus bears home new fire for the new year. In many parts, should a tree happen to be struck by lightning, all the fires on the hearths are extinguished and the torches are lit from the genuine "wild-fire."

In some valleys water is renewed in a similar manner. Either at Midsummer or on the 1st of May, the village youth run through all the houses, upset the pails, and fetch fresh water from the hallowed spring in the wood.

But these customs are fast disappearing throughout Germany, as well as in Bavaria, and the renewal of the water is now a mere tradition.

SAFELY MARRIED.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AN EXPERIENCE," "DAISY'S TRIALS," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TURNING to discover at what I looked so strangely, what held my lifted arm arrested, Edgar Ramsay confronted Angela.

The dear girl told me afterwards that, hearing loud and angry talking, she had reproached herself for cowardice in leaving me to bear the brunt of the battle alone, had feared the effect of such excitement for me, and so had resolved to face an enemy whom before now she had found as cruel as cowardly.

Edgar Ramsay was for Angela an enemy of long standing. Angela had been the innocent cause, years and years ago, when they might fairly have all been counted mere children, of the first outbreak of hostility between the cousins, Allan constituting himself her champion and protector, as Edgar, sometimes playfully, sometimes maliciously, had been her tormentor and persecutor. In more recent times, too, Angela had again been the object of Allan's protection from Edgar's different kind of persecution.

"The lady herself!" said Edgar Ramsay, with an indescribable insolence of tone and look, which insolence, however, by degrees failed him before the gaze of Angela's star-like and holy eyes, and the quiet intensity of concentrated contempt with which she said,

"It is you, you, who dare so vilely wrong the memory of a dead good man! It is an action worthy of you!"

I at least felt something in her voice that penetrated to the marrow of my bones.

"You said," she went on, "I think you said that I was Allan Braithwait's mistress. He had no mistress. He was as pure from such sin as are God's angels. I his mistress! I would have been glad and proud to be his servant. On that last time I saw him I implored him to let me go away with him, and be to him as a servant. Because he was so ill, so lonely, so miserable, because there was then no one else to love him, and I loved him so, I asked him that. Yes, I loved him! I am not ashamed of having loved him. I always loved him. But he, who loved me as good men love their sisters, not with such love as men like you know anything about, for all his answer he laid his honourable hand upon my head, saying, 'Poor child, she knows not what she does.'" A moment Angela paused, because of a choking of her voice; then, with a white heat of pure passion, of indignation, and of anguished appeal, she cried,

"Good God, how long must this be so? How long, O Lord, will you see fit to suffer that this bad man, who fills the just man's place, shall have the power to rob the dead of his good name among his fellow-men? Must this be so?"

There was such clear burning truth in Angela's voice and face as the worst and stupidest of men must have recognised for truth. Mr. Ramsay was certainly not the stupidest, and probably, except in the judgment of three poor ignorant women, was almost as far from being the worst. He looked abashed. Possibly even he was smitten with admiration of the absolutely unconscious, because perfect, generosity that for the time hindered Angela, delicately proud and sensitive woman though she was, from feeling the attack upon her own honour because of the keenness of her suffering through the undeserved attack on his.

If only our enemy had left us then! But he was not a man to make a retreat, like a beaten cur with his tail between his legs.

Angela was now by my side, standing with a protecting arm thrown round me. The time of reaction, when she would feel the need to be protected, had not yet come.

"I owe Miss Richards an apology for

having too lightly credited a general rumour," he began; "I will be so far your champion, Miss Richards, as to endeavour to trace to its first source, and to give the lie to, this general rumour. In return, I appeal to the generosity of sentiment to which your words have just borne such strong testimony, and venture to remind you that the fair fame of your friend's widow should be a sacred trust in the hands of those who loved your friend; and that a lady, whose name has been, however unjustly, dimmed by the blighting breath of scandal, is not the person to be chosen as companion to so young, so innocent, so childishly simple, and so adorably lovely a creature as my little cousin Elsie. Miss Hammond would have been the first to see this, if old age and prejudice had not dimmed her sight, as they have blunted her judgment."

This was too much for me. The assumption with which he spoke, and the malice and the hypocrisy of his words, really put me past all patience. That Angela, our pure and spotless, our devout and saintly, our lily-like Angela, should be spoken of as an unfit companion for sinful, wilful, frivolous Elsie! This time my stick really flew from between my fingers towards him. It struck him across the ankle, causing him, as for perhaps a quarter of a minute his face showed, acute pain. Then—in some things he certainly was a gentlemanly villain—he stooped, picked up my cane, and with a low bow presented it to me.

"A physical mark will, I expect, be added to the mental marks this interview must leave upon me," he said. "Miss Hammond, au revoir. A riverdici, Miss Richards. It will not be long before I shall do myself the pleasure, in which, indeed, I feel a duty to be also involved, of calling on my fair cousin again. I am not inclined to be an even passive accomplice in your scheme for burying the poor little beauty alive. Perhaps, too, the golden apples of the Hesperides owed more than half their attractive charm to the fact that they were guarded by a dragon."

With those for his last words, at length he left us. He left me feeling not penitent—I could have done again what I had done, with surer aim and heavier stroke right willingly—not penitent, therefore, but humiliated. And poor Angela, when he was gone, gave way completely, and sank down, sobbing bitterly, beside my sofa. And then came Elsie and knelt

beside her, trying to comfort her, without knowing for what chiefly there was need that Angela should be comforted. But by the earnest simplicity of Elsie's efforts, and by their sweet sort of childishness, Angela was touched; and she was roused, as one is roused, to hide one's sorrows from the uncomprehending sympathy of an affectionate child, to hide what was the very sting and bitterness of her pain from Elsie.

That evening we were three depressed and heavy-hearted women. All that evening, and, I must own, for many a night and day, the air seemed to me thick and dark with coming evil. The master of Braithwait might have it in his power, as he certainly had it in his will, to make life at my cottage all but intolerable for sensitive and defenceless women.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FROM a letter received from Mr. Brock about this time, but certainly some days after that appearance of our enemy, who, it seemed, had stolen a march upon us, while having given Mr. Brock to understand that he should not for some time longer leave town, I learnt, what I had not before suspected, that Edgar Ramsay had interested, pecuniarily interested, reasons for wishing to regain some hold on Elsie.

There was something he wanted to do to some part of the property—exactly what, I have now forgotten, if, indeed, I ever understood—for which, by some twist or crank of law matters, the consent of Allan's widow, and of Allan's widow's legal advisers, had been made necessary, because, I think, the income secured to her by marriage settlements might be to some extent affected.

I, also, at the same time, from the same letter, learnt that the settlements Allan had been able to make upon Elsie were so heavy as somewhat to impoverish the estate; so that the present owner, crippled as he was by already incurred debts, found himself in the unenviable position of being "hard up" for ready money.

When Edgar Ramsay had made one or two unsuccessful attempts to see Elsie again—we kept our garden-gate, not a gate to be easily or with dignity surmounted, locked now, which was quite a new experience for that dear old gate—we had a specimen of the sort of persecution to which we might all, but more especially poor Angela, the one among us to feel it most, expect to be now subjected.

Not far from my cottage—indeed, it was there that my visitors were always obliged to find accommodation for their horses—lived a man of the name of Crosthwait, a small farmer as well as an innkeeper, a person with whom and with whose family, almost of necessity, we had a good deal to do. This man had three handsome daughters: the two older were gay, bold girls; the youngest was of a gentler and more retiring nature, and in her our poor Angela, who had once, when the girl was sick, been asked to visit her, took a great interest.

Anxious to get Susan away from the influences of her home and of her sisters, Angela had been taking much trouble to place her as attendant upon an old or invalid lady, or as nursery governess in some quiet family. She had just succeeded in finding what she thought a suitable situation for her, and in arranging everything for the girl's entering upon it, when Edgar Ramsay reappeared in the neighbourhood. Susan's sisters had always rather resented Angela's efforts to draw Susan away from them; and now Edgar Ramsay began to "notice" Susan, and the sisters, whose heads were full of idle romances, and vulgar, and foolish ambition, began to dream and to encourage Susan to dream that, "if she played her cards well," she might be mistress of Braithwait. They would none of them, therefore, hear any more about Susan's leaving home. And when, one day, Angela tried to show them plainly what alone could be the meaning, and what alone would be the end, of such "notice" as Mr. Ramsay took of pretty Susan, she was answered with a coarse insolence of innuendo that, though she had borne up bravely at the time—dared them to tell her what they meant and by whom she had been slandered, and, by the majesty of her manner, had awed them to abject apology—had sent her home, poor blossom! well-nigh broken hearted, and feeling, at the moment, as if she could never hold up her head or show her face again.

It was not only her good name he would destroy, but with it all her power of influence for good. All her life must leave her when once that was gone. And this, alas! was only a first instance of the sort of thing that soon met her at every turn. She learnt to bear it better, though not to feel it less, saying, "I must live it down," and looking upon it as punishment for the sin from which only Heaven's mercy, shown

through Allan's goodness—no goodness of her own—had saved her.

How fervently at this time I prayed!—praying for the return of the just man to be our avenger, praying as if I believed that prayers might be permitted to call back the dead.

I also at this time busied myself in writing a careful narrative of all that had passed since Allan left, of the change that had come about in Elsie, and of the insults and the wrongs to which in his absence we were subjected, trying to believe that the day would come when I might reach him with this narrative and bring him home.

I was now fully possessed with the idea that he was not dead. I took Dr. Carruthers into my confidence and counsel; I had white-headed old Mr. Brock down to confer with me. Of course no one could say that what I had come to believe was not possible. Allan might have left his ship, might therefore be now alive; but how unlikely! Yet I stimulated Mr. Brock to a fresh course of effort and of advertisement.

"After all, the strongest argument of his death, the fact that nothing has been heard of him, is, I fear, in itself a sufficient one, my dear lady. He was not a man to be careless of the interests of those left behind him."

Such were Mr. Brock's last words as he left me, and they fell on me cold and convincing, but only for the time convincing.

That year we had a most characteristic November, almost each day of which was just a fit "jour des morts." The long continuance of dead glooms and profound stillnesses affected me in a very peculiar manner, a manner in which I did not remember in all my long life to have been affected before.

There seemed to be upon me a sort of creepy consciousness of the spiritual world encompassing me, a world in which strange things lay, waiting and watching for their chance to get through and come at me. It was as if with the leaves and the flowers, and the sunshine, and the physical glory of the year, the material as it were, the fleshly clothing, had been stripped from off the world: it felt as if at any time, at any turn, one might come face to face with some harrowing revelation, some awful baring of the wont-to-be-hidden mysteries, something to make one's skin to creep and one's hair to stand on end.

Something of this same indescribable

feeling I have had when living in a house with death. It is the same thing, perhaps. In one instance, death in the house only, in the other instance, death in all the world.

I began sometimes to wonder whether I should not by-and-by find myself face to face with the dead in some visible shape, whether it might not be this that was meant by the sort of breathless suspense in which I felt myself to be held.

No doubt I was in some over-nervous state of health. As day after day, night after night, there reigned this stillness, a silence to be felt and heard, I longed for noise and motion, and at the same time found myself drawing my own breath softly and often not speaking above a whisper. All about me were so still. Angela, always of a quiet, deep-thoughted nature, was quieter now than ever, poor darling. And Elsie, all whose quaint, queer humours and pretty naughty ways had left her, was quietest of all, and stillest, looking often, with her wide eyes, as if she had just seen a ghost.

Was it this I dreaded, that I might see a ghost? that a hand would be upon my shoulder, a presence by my side, and that the fear would kill me?

I, who had always liked to be so much alone, now could not bear to be alone. More than once I had alarmed all my household by my violent ringing of my bell, for which I made some excuse, only to Angela telling the real reason, that I had been seized with a paroxysm of nameless, indefinable fear.

In the flesh or out of the flesh I was expecting Allan.

How glad I was that year of the approach of Christmas, which with its blessed beneficent bustle seemed to break the dead gloom up into life!

CHAPTER XXX.

FOR about six weeks after Christmas Mr. Ramsay was in town.

We began, during that time, to hope that the dullness of Braithwait might be our best and our sufficient protection, against any long-continued directly personal persecution.

Those were six weeks of hard frost, and of black and bitter weather. There was a good deal of sickness and of distress in our neighbourhood at this time. Angela was indefatigable in her mercies and charities, none the less so that the recipients of them now and then, nettle-like, repaid the gentleness of her touches with

stings—stings, the venom of which had been carefully instilled by Edgar Ramsay.

It was not much that our frail little Elsie could help her; what she could she did, however. Poor little Elsie! Even if she gave all her money to the poor, and grudged any expenditure on herself, she had not such merit as is in self-denial and self-sacrifice, for she hardly seemed to have a self to sacrifice or to deny—not so much from anything like saintliness, as from deficiency of vitality to wish or to will.

Just as we were beginning to feel comparatively secure—it must have been towards the end, I think, of February—the frost broke up suddenly, the weather became unusually and persistently mild, and Mr. Ramsay came down to Braithwait for some hunting.

Perhaps he was rather afraid both of my cane and of my tongue, for he did not now attempt, either by force or by fraud, to get the entry of my cottage; instead he tried—which was much more harassing and in all ways worse—to waylay the girls on their walks to and from the village and the outlying houses.

I almost think he must have had some pity, if not some love, for Elsie. I am quite sure he did not believe that her present manner of existence was of her own choice, to her own taste.

I can almost fancy that when he saw her dainty little feet roughly and strongly shod for trudging through the mud, and her dainty little form plainly, almost coarsely clad in black, when he remembered that she (who in a delicate ethereal way had been something of an epicure) now lived on simple food plainly served, when he realized how destitute of anything he could conceive as giving her enjoyment or delight were all her days, how dull with the dearest ditch-water-dulness, I can, I say, almost fancy that his eyes may sometimes have moistened with a sense of the pity of it. I can imagine him as almost able to deceive himself into believing it to be for her sake that he determinedly endeavoured to possess himself of her, for her sake, that he might reset in more than former opulence of splendour, and see shine again with more than lost lustre, the now dimmed and wasted jewel.

I don't suppose he had much doubt but that ultimately, if his own patience lasted, he should succeed in conquering her present fantastical aversion, or assumption of it.

Meanwhile he tortured both Elsie and Angela with an ingenuity of various torture. Though, as I have said, he did not himself try to gain entrance into my cottage, he assailed Elsie in it with quite a shower of notes, and messages, and gifts. We tried to defend ourselves from these by keeping the orchard-gate locked as we kept the garden-gate (it was through the orchard that the cottage was approached from behind) but the orchard-wall was too easily surmounted for this to be any protection. The notes Hannah had orders to drop at once into the kitchen fire, in sight of Mr. Ramsay's messengers. The messages she was desired never to deliver, and to let the bearers of them know they were never delivered; the presents, which those who brought them did not dare take back, we allowed for a few days to accumulate in the back-kitchen, and then my old man would pack them into my old chaise and take them whence they came, giving them in solemnly, one by one, at the door of the front hall.

I have said in what manner our enemy all the more subtly for the indirectness of it, tortured Angela, and that he waited for them, way-laid and beset them, in their walks. He never once, so Angela told me, succeeded in getting one word from Elsie, or one look, beyond that, mingled of fear, of hatred, and of disdain, which recognised him on his approach, nor did he succeed in ever meeting Elsie alone, ever, even for one moment, detaching her from Angela's side.

What real harm, it might, therefore, be asked, could these meetings do them? But both the poor young things were now weak of nerve and easily shaken, through much sorrow and suffering, and the constant recurrence of the same kind of annoyances not only tried them beyond any reasonable measure, but caused vague apprehension and expectation, a mental questioning of what next? It seemed almost as if they would be forced to keep themselves close prisoners till Edgar Ramsay, tired out, should again have left the neighbourhood.

"How is it to end?" asked Angela despairingly one evening when this sort of thing had been going on for weeks. We were alone together, after Elsie had gone to bed. "If we all went away would he follow us?"

"He might, my dear, in his present mood. And where could we be as safe as we are here? Sometimes I think he wants to drive us away because he knows that

we are safe here from any positive personal danger. In a strange place we might not be even that. He might be plotting and planning to carry poor little Elsie off."

"That is just what I am afraid he may attempt some day, even here," answered Angela. "There is sometimes such a look about him, dear Miss Hammond, when he fixes his eyes on Elsie—such a desperate look."

"You are too nervous, poor child," I told her. "Such things don't happen now-a-days." I seemed to have forgotten that it was I who had first, an instant before, put this notion into words.

I don't think it is any exaggeration to say that, during this one season oftener than in all my life at my cottage before, the hunting cavalcade would crowd the narrow lane bounding my garden. Of course in some way Edgar Ramsay contrived this, in the hope of rousing Elsie to the desire to be among them, desire to be again in the thick of that gay stir and exhilarating tumult, desire to be a-field again in the brisk wind and bright sunshine—a-field again, and again queen of the field.

It is a pity he could not have seen how Elsie, at the first sound or sign of their approach, would shut herself up in her room with blinds drawn down, would bury her face in her pillow and press her hand over her ears (so I again and again found her), and shudder, as she might have shuddered had it been the Phantom Huntsman with his demon pack of a German ghost story who was sweeping by, not those merry daylight English men and women.

Things were very sad, very bad, with us when one April morning's post brought me a letter, marked "private" and "herself," from old Mr. Brock. Happily, that letter was seen only by Hannah before it was brought to me. I was not quite well, and was breakfasting in bed. It was a most cautiously-worded despatch. The object of it was to ask me to send to him, as immediately as was possible, such a letter as I should like to come to the eyes and the knowledge of Mr. Braithwait, should Mr. Braithwait be still alive. He then, quite sternly, forbade me to come to any conclusion that this was so. He had, he said, learned something which made it seem likely that their client had left the North Star at some early date of her fatal voyage; but quite as likely that, if he had done so, he had perished in some other way, by illness

or accident. He was about, he said, at once to go abroad to trace up the seeming clue, and there could be no need for him to promise to give me information of whatever kind he might obtain with as small delay as possible.

Of course, sanguine old fool as I was, I jumped immediately to the conclusion that Allan Braithwait was alive and well, and would soon be home! I made all haste to forward to Mr. Brock my carefully-prepared narrative of events since Allan had left us, and I lived in such a state of suppressed excitement, as, but for the fact that there was so much joy and hope in it, and that joy and hope are to the soul's life of the aged what sunshine is to the body, must soon have brought my many years to a speedy close. At the end of April or the beginning of May, I think it was the later time, we missed Mr. Ramsay—his persecutions had ceased. We were told he had gone to town for some months. Silly enough to believe this, we breathed freely; a sense of relieved elasticity came into our lives. I could not refrain from prophesying to my poor dear children that our tormentor would no more torment us, that some judgment would overtake him, that our troubles drew near upon their end! The cheering influence of the warm and lovely spring days was telling upon us. I even fancied that in still, and pale, and shadowy little Elsie, there was some stir and change as towards more life, and something more of substance.

"You look somewhat stronger, my pet," I said to her one day, when the May sunshine, falling upon her, did not seem so sadly ready to shine through her. Directly I had spoken I wished my words unsaid, for the poor thing's eyes filled with tears, which, brimming over, fell in heavy drops on her black gown, as she mourned out,

"Shall I have to live to be old, do you think, auntie? To be very old, to be as old as you are? And shall I never, never, never all that time see him again? Never, never be happy again?"

"God only knows, Elsie; but you know that what He wills will be for your true good. Happiness is a strange thing, Elsie, child; it comes sometimes in full measure to those who seem past all personal cause for it." She answered nothing, and I went on, "Some people have great happiness through the happiness of others—like Angela, who I verily believe" I was saying this more to myself than to Elsie,

"could be quite happy, if just left in peace, in knowing those she loved were happy, without having any more personal reason for being happy; just because, within and without, she, who loves God, would be at rest. There are other people, Elsie, to whom God in His mercy allows their own happiness to return when they believe themselves to have forfeited all possibility of it."

"That last way cannot be my way," said Elsie, with a strained wistful expression of face. "Nor can the other way. I am not good enough for that other way. I know quite well I can never be really good, like Angela; the most I can do, with all my trying, is to keep from being naughty. Of course I shall never be happy again! How dare I think about happiness? But, I thought it would not be for long that I had to live, and, so, I did not so much mind. But now, now, when you tell me I look stronger, and when I feel stronger—Oh, Auntie, why will not my heart break?" She hid her face on my knee, she had been sitting sewing on a stool near my feet, and she sobbed as she had some time ceased to be able to sob. Not for long, now, however. Then, poor little soul, she dried her eyes and resumed her sewing.

We were alone that evening, for Angela was keeping her bed.

For some time she had been rather weak and ailing, then a cold she caught fixed itself upon her obstinately, and Dr. Carruthers, whose attention had been called to her by Elsie's timidly asking him if Angela did not look ill, had taken her in hand and ordered her for a day or two to keep her bed. "It is the rest she wants as much as anything," he told me.

Presently, as we sat there, Elsie and I, silent in the evening sunshine, I, wholly occupied with thoughts of which I dared as yet hint nothing to poor Elsie, Hannah came in to say that Comfort Wakefield's baby was taken much worse, and that she had sent a child up to ask if one of the ladies would come and see it.

"It will die," said Elsie, jumping up. "It is such a pretty baby, and all the pretty babies die. What can we do? Angela cannot go. I must go, but I shan't know what ought to be done for it—may Hannah go with me?"

"Of course, my dear, she may. I should

not have thought of your going alone," was my answer.

A few minutes after, leaning on my cane, I hobbled down as far as the garden-gate with them. I stood there a few moments in the sunshine, looking after them, thinking, I am afraid, less of Comfort Wakefield and her baby, less of Elsie and my now weakening but still alive hope about poor Allan, than of myself—of the many thousand times my feet had taken the path those I looked after now took, and of how they would never take that path again! Thinking how strange it was to recognise that on many a May-day to come, this scene might look the same, just as peaceful, just as fair, smiling back just that same smile, to just such sunshine; while the chances, at my age, were small indeed, that on any other May-time my eyes would look upon it, my feet standing where they stood now. Fatuous and senile tears dimmed my vision for a moment at this thought.

Then Hannah, looking back, seeing me still there—looking back before she followed Elsie into the larch-wood, through which, after they had gone some yards along the lane, had crossed a stone stile, and gone down a steep meadow, ran the path to Comfort Wakefield's cottage, shouted to me not to stay longer or I should take cold, and I obediently, the spell broken, turned and hobbled back towards the house.

That particular little larch-wood, looking, as I looked down upon it, in the May evening light, just a congregation of sunniest green plumes, was said to be haunted. Hannah set herself high above such superstitions, higher indeed than did her mistress. But Hannah confessed to me afterwards that as she passed into the light shadow of the wood that afternoon, or rather evening—we had taken tea, I know, before Elsie started—she had a curious creepy feeling come over her.

Having confessed this, however, to keep me from triumphing, she hastened to add,

"And it was for no ghost as I felt this, as is proved, Miss Hammond, ma'am. For no ghost, but what's far more to fear, any night or day, than any ghost—a downright bad man!"